



## Connecting to the Khans: Shaping National Identity of the Next Generation through Education in Kazakhstan

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When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Kazakhs did not make up the majority of the population in their own titular state. Since then, Kazakhs have become the majority ethnic group and the government revised the education system to reflect this demographic change. Education is an important tool for shaping national identity in a multiethnic state, especially one undergoing demographic shifts. This article is a snapshot of how the demographic change in Kazakhstan has affected education and in turn how this is shaping national identity on young generations. This transformation is important to monitor and understand as Kazakhstan continues to develop and become an important security partner and increasingly vital source of energy supplies for Asia and Europe.

*Keywords:* Kazakhstan, national identity, education, multiethnic, curriculum

The suffix ‘-stan’ is used to form the name of several states in Central and Southern Asia. It comes from the Persian word ‘stān’, meaning place or land (The Macquarie Dictionary, 2005). Kazakhstan translates into ‘The land of Kazakhs’, although this carries with it a somewhat misleading meaning. Out of all the post-Soviet Central Asian states, Kazakhstan is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous (Szayna, 2003). At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Kazakhs did not make up a majority of the population in their own titular state. It is only during the last several years that Kazakhs became the definite majority.

Over the last several years the government in Kazakhstan passed laws and changed civic institutions that reflect this demographic change (Blum, 2003). This has happened in the state’s education system, specifically through the curriculum, the textbooks, and lessons in schools. Basic compulsory education reaches a broad audience and the younger generations in Kazakhstan do not have the same national identity that the previous generations did during the Soviet Union. This article is a snapshot at demographic change in Kazakhstan, how it has affected education and in turn how this has shaped the national identity of young generations. This transformation

is important to monitor and understand as Kazakhstan continues to develop and become an important security partner and increasingly vital source of energy supplies for Asia and Europe.

### Background

#### History of Kazakhs and Kazakhstan

Kazakhs are Turkic people who trace their roots from the descendants of Turkic and Turko-Mongol groups. The first Kazakh Khanate was established in 1465-66 when two tribal leaders broke away from the Uzbek Khanate (another Turkic group) and formed their own khanate. This khanate was divided into three groups called *zhuz* or a horde, namely the Great, Middle, and Little hordes. The hordes and clan system survive to the present day, but unofficially. Each of the hordes has numerous clans (Esenova, 2002) and below that individual families. Because of the people’s nomadic lifestyle, the Kazakh Khanate was not a fixed state. The Kazakhs did have, however, an identity that would later be challenged when the Russian Empire expanded into the region in the eighteenth century.

The Russian Empire established a bureaucracy, including formal education, which did not follow the lines of the Kazakh *zhuz* or clan systems (Zharmukhamed, 2004).

This education system put Russian-related subjects to the forefront and marginalized Kazakhs. The Kazakhs formed a short-lived independent government in 1917, but then were incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920 (Esenova, 2002). This was the last time that Kazakhs had a real hand in shaping institutions that reflected what they thought about themselves. The Soviet Union's actions ensured that Kazakh identity would be shaped by an outside entity for some time. The Soviet government used its control over the education system to create a Soviet identity system (Ro'i, 1984; Esenova, 2002). They also remapped the borders and resettled other ethnicities that made Kazakhs a minority in their own republic (Zharmukhamed, 2004).

The most recent and relevant changes began during the last years of the Soviet Union (in the mid-to-late 1980s). The removal of Kazakh Dinmukhamed Konayev as First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party and appointment of Russian Gennady Kolbin, a man who had never worked in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), led to protests and a riot in Almaty in December of 1986, an event known as the Zheltoksan incident. Kazakh university students were angry that outsiders were interfering in Kazakh affairs and while this incident was a grassroots movement, it resulted in concrete legal changes. In March of 1987, the Kazakh Communist Party Central Committee passed a new law "On Improving the Study of the Kazakh Language." This was the Communist Party's way of keeping peace after the events of the preceding year. This was the first of several laws on the status of the Kazakh language and highlighted changes in attitude. The 1989 "Law on Languages" was important because the general public had a hand in its creation. Prior to its passage there were many public meetings and debates held to discuss it (Fierman, 1998).

Alongside these new laws there was a demographic shift in Kazakhstan. Ethnic Kazakhs were a minority in the Kazakh SSR for a number of years. During the period from 1979-1989, they became the largest ethnic group, going from 36% of the population, according to the 1979 Soviet census, to 40.1% in the 1989 census. While this certainly is not a majority, it is significant when compared to the next largest ethnic group, ethnic Russians were 40.8% of the population in 1979 and then dropped to 37.4% in 1989 (Oka, 2006). Most importantly, the number of ethnic Kazakhs continued to grow, and in 1999, they made up 53.4% of the population. Many Russians left Kazakhstan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Kazakhs have had a higher birth rate than other ethnicities. According to the 2009 census they now make up 63% (Stat.kz, 2009).

Now that Kazakhs make up a more solid majority of the population in Kazakhstan, it is logical that they hold key positions in the government. Many positions within the government require the ability to speak Kazakh and many aspects of life are now bureaucratically slanted in ways that favor Kazakhs, including promotion preference for Kazakhs

(Szayna, 2003). This does not mean that minority groups are completely ignored. Russian remains an important 'official' language in Kazakhstan (Zharmukhamed, 2004) and the Prime Minister, Karim Masimov, is an ethnic Uyghur (RFE/RL, 2007).

Additionally, the government set up schools for some minorities. There are schools for Russian, Uyghur, and Uzbek speakers, the latter two being synonymous with that ethnic group. This is not an example of government segregation in schools. In a Russian school it is common to find students of all ethnicities. In Kazakh, Uyghur, or Uzbek schools, it is typical to find only those ethnic groups there. Parents have a choice on what language school their child attends; it is not a government directive according to administrators I interviewed at the Altynsarin Institute.

**Using Education as a Tool in Shaping National Identity**

National identity according to Smith (1991, p.9), "involves some sense of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code or rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong."

There are different civic institutions that can be used to shape national identity in a multiethnic state. One of the most important and far reaching is a state's education system. Education is one of the first places where a young generation is socialized into a larger group, which is particularly important if they come from different ethnic backgrounds (Perko, 2003), and this socialization happens at a time when identities are being developed (Jo, 2004). Education can shape the attitude of an entire generation (Christou, 2006).

Providing education in a multiethnic state is not a new issue. Some states have used centrally controlled education as a tool (Abu-Saad, 2008; McLean, 2007; Segawa, 2007) in an effort to assimilate other ethnicities and at times, allow them elements of educational and cultural autonomy. This is also the same for Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's government has almost total control over the education system and there is a multi-ethnic generation that has recently finished compulsory education or are currently students in their last few years of school. They are the first generation to be educated entirely in Kazakhstan as an independent state and their national identity is highly influenced by the Kazakh education system.

### **Education in Kazakhstan**

The curriculum standards are an important tool the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan can use to shape national identity. It represents what the government of Kazakhstan wants their younger generations to know and to think about certain subjects. The standards, *Gosudarstvennye Obshcheobrazatel'nye Standarty Srednego Obshchego Obrazovaniia Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Government Compulsory Standards of Secondary

Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2002) written at the Altynsarin Institute in Almaty named after Ibrahim Altynsarin, an important historical figure in Kazakh education. Altynsarin founded the first national secular schools in Kazakhstan and is considered a key figure in Kazakh educational history (Altynsarin.ru, 2009). The institute is used to train teachers who will work in primary and secondary schools and many of its professors and instructors contributed to the standards. Other authors of the standards teach at universities and schools around Kazakhstan. A distinguishing feature of these authors is that they are almost all ethnic Kazakhs.

The main purpose of Kazakhstan's education system is, not unlike any other state, to educate its citizens to either continue education in an institute or university, or to enter the workforce. Kazakhstan inherited an education system from the Soviet Union, which was strong in math and sciences. In an effort to diversify its economy from being too dependent on energy exports, Kazakhstan restructured its education system to be on a level with developed states (Daly, 2008). This system, specifically secondary education, includes 19 subjects that students study from the 5th through the 11th grade. The subjects include math and science courses, physical education, and several courses in the humanities.

In order to gather data on the national identity of young generations currently studying in school, five subjects from the humanities were selected because they have the most potential of shaping identity. These subjects are: literature, history, fundamentals of social studies, language(s) (both native and foreign), and geography. These subjects are closest to the fundamental features of national identity that Smith (1991, p. 14) stated: "an historical territory, or homeland (for the subject history); common myths and historical memories (history and literature); a common, mass public culture (languages and literature); common legal rights and duties for all members (fundamentals of social studies); and a common economy with territorial mobility for members (geography)." Smith's fundamentals may not fit exactly with these five subjects, but are the best possible choices.

Each subject in the standards has goals and requirements on what information students need to know, some of which is based on their grade level. A subject like literature for example includes important writers and novels that students will study. The other subjects have their own appropriate requirements. Each subject includes a section as a guide for teachers to check the knowledge of the students. The section states that "a minimum level of knowledge (the requirements) must be obtained" and that the student either "achieved" or "did not achieve" this level.

### **Literature**

There are two categories of literature in the curriculum, Kazakh and Russian literature. The goals and requirements sections state that students need to understand

different types of written literature and important writers and their works for different periods in history.

Kazakh literature focuses mainly on writers from the nineteenth century, called the classic enlighteners, and the twentieth century. One of the main classic enlighteners is Abay Kunanbaev. Among Kazakhs, Abay is considered to be the most important writer in their history. He was the first to write about what it means to be 'Kazakh'. Other notable writers include Mukhtar Auezov, who wrote a novel about Abay's life, Saken Seifullin, and Akhmet Baitursynov. The latter two are writers who were executed in the Stalin purges of intellectuals and enemies of the state in the 1930s. Due to their label as an enemy, they were not thought of as significant writers during the Soviet Union.

The requirements of Russian literature focus on writers and works of the eighteenth through the twentieth century. The section on the eighteenth century is titled the 'Russian Classical Literature of the 18th Century' and students are required to know about well known writers like Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekov and their works. The sections on the twentieth century include Gorky, Akhmatova, Pasternak and their writings.

The literature sections of the standards are inclusive of the two major ethnicities in Kazakhstan, Kazakhs and Russians. Each section has a broad historical range of literature and well-known writers and students study both topics. Although not listed in the standards, Ugyhurs have the freedom to teach their own literature. Schools have their own literature textbooks complete with notable writers from their own history. This demonstrates that Kazakhstan is acknowledging its minority groups.

### **History**

According to the goals and requirements of this section students need to know about history as it relates to people, the environment, and the community. It consists of world history and history of Kazakhstan. The first topic covers ancient Egyptians, the Greek and Roman Empires, the Middle-Ages, and recent history. The history of Kazakhstan also covers an extended period from ancient history through the Soviet Union to the present day.

There are more specific requirements that go further into topics of Kazakh history such as the Khans of the fifteenth century, the war against Russia over the colonization of Kazakh lands, and even the development strategy of Kazakhstan into the year 2030. This latter topic demonstrates how a connection has been made between the past and the not-too-distant future, where Kazakhstan sees itself in the group of developed states of the world. Lastly, this section mentions that there is a problem of bias in teaching history, both Kazakh and world history. This bias is "euro-centric" and that this perspective needs to be "studied," implying that it needs to be altered.

The two courses, world and Kazakhstan history, both cover extensive periods of history. World history

includes a wide range but the latter topic deals mainly with history relating to Kazakhs and does not include other major ethnic groups. The euro-centric bias in this case could be interpreted as the Russian/Soviet, European, western, or a combination of all these perspectives. Kazakhs believe that the teaching of their history during the Soviet Union was marginalized. This is, in a sense, their way of correcting that problem. Unlike literature, no other ethnic group has its own history section.

### **Fundamentals of Social Studies**

This is a subject with a range of goals and requirements that deal with the role of citizens in Kazakhstan in areas of political-economic, socio-cultural, and general development of the community. Other requirements are separated into categories such as people, community, and the environment. These are meant to give the students an idea of what the community is and what their role is within it.

The topic of community in this section includes themes of philosophy and great thinkers. Several of these listed are known throughout the world such as Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes. There are however, other philosophers listed like Korkit, a Central Asian-Turkic poet from the ninth century, and Al-Farabi, an Islamic-Persian scientist and philosopher also from the ninth century. Additionally, there is list of Kazakh philosophers like the writer/poet Abay as well as Toli Bey, Kazibek Bey, and Aiteke Bey, famous tribal leaders from Kazakh history.

The social studies section is an effort to include everyone in the community. It is meant to teach students their role in the community and to think about ways that they can be involved. However, teaching the philosophies of Turkic, Islamic, and Kazakh origin means that only students of certain ethnic groups can see a connection between themselves and the material. There are Russians, Ukrainians and even Koreans and Germans still living in Kazakhstan, each group with a considerable number of people. The requirements, specifically studying Turkic or Islamic philosophies, do not take this latter demographic group into consideration.

### **Languages**

The two most important languages in Kazakhstan, Kazakh and Russian, are subjects that every student studies. In the case of Uyghur or Uzbek schools, their respective languages are also studied. Within the standards are three subject sections on Kazakh, Russian, and foreign languages, the latter of which consists of English, Arabic, French, German, and Chinese.

The chapter on Kazakh language is written for non-native speakers of Kazakh, namely for Russian, Uyghur, and Uzbek schools. It is written in the goals that because Kazakh is a state language it is necessary to communicate in it and to be introduced to the culture of it. This will help to prepare the student for later opportunities. In addition to this, the standards say that being able to speak

and write the language is especially important, mentioning a few more times the importance of communication and connections to Kazakh culture and history.

The chapter on Russian language is similar in scope to that of Kazakh, only that the main goals are to use the language are more in depth. It states that knowing Russian is important for intellectual, emotional, and moral development in studying. It also lists further uses for the language, such as further educational and career purposes, that far exceed expectations compared to requirements for Kazakh.

The chapter on foreign languages has a main goal of mastering basic skills in a non-native language. The goals state that this will happen by forming simple and communicative abilities in a foreign language for use in interactions with another culture in typical situations. Each of the languages has its own goals and requirements, many of which are focused on grammar, phonetics, and lexical usage.

These sections do include both of the major languages of Kazakhstan, as well as foreign languages, but there is some inconsistency in the requirements. In addition to their native language, most ethnic Kazakh students naturally have a high level of proficiency in Russian. The high requirements for Russian are for all students and come as no surprise; Russian is still the *lingua franca* among all ethnicities and its inclusion in the standards is an important acknowledgement of other ethnicities. Conversely, students of other ethnicities speak their native language (Russian) but have low levels of proficiency in Kazakh. The standards say that it is necessary to be able to communicate in Kazakh, but do not mention any specific proficiency level. These requirements are also for non-native speakers of Kazakh, meaning expectations for non-native Kazakh speakers are vague. Considering that knowledge of Kazakh is required for government positions, most Russian speakers should be able to move on to higher education and find jobs, but they will have problems finding work in the government.

### **Geography**

The main goals of geography are more scientific than the other subjects and as a result have somewhat less of an influence on identity. However, under the requirements of the subject are a number of different topics important to the study of geography. Several of these do relate to the study of geopolitical issues like natural resources, environmental problems, and how regions of the world break down economically, historically, and culturally. This is the least direct subject when analyzing how it shapes identity. Geopolitical topics are mentioned but do not go into any detail. A few of the topics are literally written as 'The Spreading of Religion in the World' or 'Green Revolution' without any further explanation. Some deductions can be made from topics like these, but it is necessary to look at how these lessons are taught.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Observations**

While the national curriculum includes important information, how students are taught this material and what they think about those particular topics is more significant. To determine this I visited four schools in the city of Almaty to observe lessons in literature, history, fundamentals of social studies, languages, and geography. I also gave a questionnaire out to students in order to find out what they generally think about the five subjects, but this is explained in detail later in the article. I chose four schools in the city to gather information from, two Russian, one Kazakh, and one Uyghur. These schools are named for the main language of instruction, not necessarily for students' ethnicity. For Kazakh and Uyghur schools, however, this does represent the main ethnicity of the student population. I made a preliminary visit to each school to get permission to observe lessons and distribute the questionnaires. The schools were selected based on a cross section of the major ethnic groups. One of the Russian schools, #35, is a magnet school for foreign language instruction.

At each of the schools I observed lessons in the five subject areas mentioned in grades 9-11. A typical lesson observation included following along with the textbook if an extra one was available, looking at various pictures and other learning aids in the room, and speaking with the teacher for a few minutes during a break. During some of the visits I also toured the school facilities including the libraries and in the case of two schools, small museums.

#### **School #12**

This is a Kazakh language school that I visited four times during the course of research. I observed eight lessons in all, and toured the library. Unlike other schools I visited, this one held a morning assembly on two of the four visits. The assembly took place in the lobby, surrounded by various pictures of Kazakh national symbols and the flag, and included the singing of the national anthem. There was also an assistant director on hand for both assemblies who strictly oversaw everything.

Many of the classes I attended used the government-issued textbooks for subjects like Kazakh language and literature, Russian language and literature, history, geography, and in some cases English. The majority of these textbooks were printed, depending on the subject, within the past five years. This is a fairly good indication that the material being taught does follow the national curriculum standards. One of the most noticeable things I observed took place during a history lesson. In the back of the history classroom was a large poster of a timeline of the history of Kazakhstan. An interesting feature on the timeline shows that modern Kazakhstan can be traced back to the foundation of the Kazakh Khanate in 1465-66. The timeline shows that despite subsequent governments or historical periods, such as the Russian

Empire and the Soviet Union, the idea of a Kazakh state never disappeared.

The visit to the library was also an important factor in determining the overall tone of the school. There were a dozen shelves of books; the majority of them were in Kazakh and only one shelf in Russian. Those that were in another language like English were a series of famous novels that only an advanced or fluent speaker would be able to read.

The school has other influences outside of the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan. Several English classes used a series of books printed by Oxford University Press, and one teacher pointed out to me that they only use the government issued books for English when preparing for exams. I also noticed that students were conversing with each other in a mix of Russian and Kazakh.

#### **School #28**

This is a Russian language school that I visited three times and observed six lessons, toured the school museum, and interviewed a teacher. This school had various national symbols of Kazakhstan in the lobby and adorning the hallways, but did not have any kind of morning assembly during any of the visits. The student population was made up of a variety of ethnicities, but mainly Russian, Kazakh, and Ukrainian, according to a senior teacher and administrator.

The Geography, and Russian and Kazakh language classes I observed used the government-issued textbooks, all printed in the last four to five years. What made the Kazakh language lessons significant was the size, as each class had no more than eight students. After the lesson I spoke with the teacher about how well she thought students were learning Kazakh. She said that these were 11th grade students who had studied Kazakh for seven years but were still working with an intermediate level of the language. It is worth questioning whether or not standards have been set against them achieving high levels of proficiency in the language. I asked this to the teacher after class and she agreed that expectations for non-Kazakhs to learn the language were generally low. She acknowledged that Kazakh is becoming a more important language but that students in Almaty do not have opportunities to practice it outside of class. She suggested that an educational center be set up so that students could have a place to use the language. In contrast to this was the Russian language class I observed where 25 students were packed tightly into a room. They used the government-issued textbooks and the group quickly moved through a series of exercises.

The Russian Literature class I observed was about Maxim Gorky, who is specified in the standards. When I spoke with the teacher after class I noticed that the lesson was taught from a textbook from the 1970s, as the teacher felt the quality of books from that time period was better. She said that the students still read the texts from current books, but she read aloud in class and asked some questions

from the older Soviet version. She also mentioned, without me asking, that the students do not see much of a connection with the material that they read to their own lives.

During one of my visits to this school I was surprised to learn that the school had a museum and I was able to take a quick tour of it. The museum is made up of one room with several exhibits about the history of the school and a few well-known people who graduated from there including Olzhas Suleimenov, an anti-nuclear weapons activist. One of these in particular was a young woman named Menshuk, who was killed during the Second World War and later awarded Hero of the Soviet Union. One entire wall was dedicated to her, including a large painting of her in battle while the area in front of it had dirt and several things picked up from the place where she died.

#### **School #35**

This is a Russian language magnet school that I visited four times, observed 11 lessons, and toured the library. There was not an assembly before school but I noticed that there were the usual symbols and posters of Kazakhstan adorning the walls of the lobby. There was also a small section on the wall about Friday being the day to speak Kazakh, with a poster encouraging 'Let's Speak Kazakh'.

Most of the lessons I observed used the government-printed textbooks, including Fundamentals of Social Studies, Geography, History, and Kazakh language. The English classes used a series from the Oxford University Press. The English teachers I spoke with said that the quality of this series was better and helped the students, but that like School #12 the government-printed books are used to prepare students for tests. The Geography teacher mentioned that the textbooks lacked useful information. I went to an additional Geography lesson where students were discussing current events, focusing mainly on food products that they had recently researched. The same teacher said that she wants students to use more outside sources like the media to supplement lessons.

I visited the library of the school and found that it included a fairly-even mix of Russian and Kazakh books, with a small selection in English. The librarian showed me books from the Soviet Union still in use despite some that are falling apart.

I was also able to watch a Kazakh language and literature class during one of the visits. The students were discussing an excerpt from a story they had read, reading and repeating sections of it in Kazakh. This was the only time they used the language, except for the teacher speaking to them in Kazakh during the lesson, and even during the last 10-15 minutes of the lesson, the teacher reverted to speaking Russian.

#### **School #153**

This is a Uyghur language school that I visited three times and observed 10 lessons, and toured the library

and school museum. The school featured many of the same symbols and posters of Kazakhstan that other schools had, except that everything in the school was written in Uyghur. The school was named for Rozybakiev, a Uyghur who was involved in the Bolshevik Revolution in Kazakhstan. During one of the days I observed lessons, I arrived to find a morning assembly where the students lined up outside the school and sang the national anthem. However, a few minutes after this it changed into an informal period of exercises with dance music and a lot of joking between teachers and students.

I was not able to watch a variety of class levels in this school, but instead observed a 9th grade group of students during many of their lessons. This was the arrangement that the school had set up for observations, not a choice on my part. This also meant observing a few classes not in one of the five subjects, such as physics and algebra, but turned out to be valuable proof that all of the classes are taught in Uyghur. For some of the classes, such as Geography and English, the government-issued textbooks were used. All of these textbooks were written in Uyghur.

I noticed that these 9th grade students rarely spoke Uyghur to each other, instead using Russian. I noticed that the teachers pushed the students to speak Uyghur in class but with mixed results. Many of them could easily converse in it during classes, while a few had trouble and reverted back to speaking in Russian even if it meant being scolded by the teacher.

During one of the visits I was able to take a quick tour of the library, where I found the usual selection of Russian and Kazakh materials, but also a large quantity of books in Uyghur. The students who accompanied me inside were quick to point out this collection. This group of students had also taken it upon themselves to show me a small room where the school museum is housed. It included traditional Uyghur musical instruments, pictures of former teachers and students, a section dedicated for the first director of the school, and a section about Rozybakiev with newspaper clippings about him from the time of the revolution. Even as I left the library the students continued talking about their heritage, without any questions from me. A few of them talked about how they should have a country of their own. A student showed me photos on his cell phone of the map of a potential Uyghur state, the unofficial flag with a blue background and a crescent moon and a star that Uyghur people associate with, and others of Uyghur clothing and culture. Many of these aspirations are shared by Uyghurs living across the border in the Xinjiang region in China.

#### **Observation Summary**

The Kazakh school, #12, has teachers, textbooks, lessons and a general attitude influencing its students in a way that reflects the national curriculum standards. Some of these same characteristics can be found at schools, #28, #35, and #153. In all schools there are teachers who

decided not to use government-issued textbooks for some lessons, instead preferring older or outside materials. The library of a Russian school (#35) also retained a large number of Russian-language books as did School #153 for books in Uyghur. The Uyghur school is also noteworthy as it represents the recognition of another ethnic group. The conclusion of observations in schools is that while there is a major focus on Kazakh attributes in school subjects, there are some other features that act as a balance to this. The overall material presented to students closely follows the curriculum set out by the government. It reflects the demographic change; most material puts Kazakhs at the forefront, but it is also inclusive of other ethnic groups.

### **Questionnaires**

The questionnaire included five questions; one for each of the subjects observed. Students were instructed to not write their name on the questionnaire; this was told to them before giving the questionnaire out and written on the top of the paper. The questions were broad and open in order to allow students to answer with their own opinion. The process was intended to be similar to an interview, but questionnaires were distributed in order to get the most honest answers possible. This was done out of a cultural and peer pressure consideration; individual answers and thought are not widely encouraged in this society. It should be stressed again that this is a snapshot of how education influences identity of young generations in Kazakhstan.

Conducting research in Kazakhstan can be a difficult endeavor. Despite a significant effort to open up to the western world, a foreign presence in Kazakhstan is still viewed with some suspicion. Even though this meant that answers may not be easily coded, I felt general questions were more appropriate. Specific questions about opinions and about ethnicity in particular might be viewed by locals as inflammatory and ultimately counterproductive for this study. It should also be pointed out that directly asking about national identity is problematic. In the Kazakh language the term for national and ethnic can be used as one word, *ūlt*. Therefore, it is difficult to use the term national identity or ethnic identity with a group of people who do not have similar terminology or viewpoint.

Questionnaires were translated into both Russian and Kazakh and while a Uyghur version was not translated, the teachers at School #153 felt that their students could answer in Russian. I did not give out surveys at School #35 due to having enough from another Russian language source, School #28. Overall there were 67 surveys from School #12, 93 surveys from School #28, and 18 surveys from School #153. I translated the survey answers with the assistance of language instructors in Kazakhstan and at the University of Kansas. The following section will include the question followed by the consensus from each of the three schools surveyed.

### **Question #1**

*What do you think are the most important works of*

*literature (For example Kazakh, Russian, American literature, etc.)? Who are the most important writers in literature? Why do you think they are important? Write as many examples of works and writers you feel is appropriate.*

**School #12 – Kazakh school.** All students gave answers that were very similar with the topics listed under the standards. They wrote that Abay Kunanbaev and Mukhtar Auezov are the most important Kazakh writers. Less than 50% of the students wrote an answer for Russian literature. A dozen students wrote that Shakespeare is significant, and three students answered that J.R.R. Tolkien was important.

**School #28 – Russian school.** Around 90% of the students wrote that Abay, Auezov and Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Gogol are important for Kazakh and Russian literature respectively. A dozen wrote that Shakespeare is notable and two students answered Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. One other thing worth mentioning is that students from this school gave the most complete answers to this question. All wrote at least one example for Kazakh, Russian, and foreign literature.

**School #153 – Uyghur school.** 75% of the students from the Uyghur school listed the well known Kazakh and Russian writers. Half also identified Mahmud al-Kashgari, an 11th century Turkic scholar and writer as important in literature.

### **Question #2**

*What do you think are the most important periods or significant events in history (For example world, Kazakh, Russian, Eurasian history, etc.)? Why do you think that they are important? Write as many examples of periods or events you feel is appropriate.*

**School #12 – Kazakh school.** There was a variety of answers but around 75% of students listed four incidents or specific periods of time. They were: the years 1465-66 when the Kazakh Khans created a Khanate, the Second World War (when it involved the Soviet Union) 1941-45, the Zheltoksan incident, and when Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991. Three students who wrote that the Zheltoksan protests were important also mentioned that the incident helped Kazakhstan gain independence.

**School #28 – Russian school.** Around 75% of the students listed two events as the most significant, the Second World War and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Less than 10 students put the Zheltoksan incident as important and said that Kazakhstan's independence resulted from it, and two students even put the creation of the Kazakh Khanate and referred to the Khans as being 'ours'.

**School #153 – Uyghur school.** The students gave a variety of answers, but around 75% wrote that the Second World War and Kazakhstan's independence were the most significant. Two wrote that the break-up of the Soviet Union and the economic problems of 2008 were also important events.

### **Question #3**

*Do you think it is important to be involved in your community (neighborhood, district, city, country, globally)? Why or why not? Who do you think plays an important role in your community? Why?*

**School #12 – Kazakh school.** Around 65% of the students from the Kazakh school said that it is important to be involved in the community and half of those also wrote that the current president Nursultan Nazarbayev plays an important role. Seven students identified Dinmukhamed Konayev, the longtime First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party in the Kazakh SSR, as a person who played an important role in the community. Two students said that it is not important to be involved, and around one third did not answer the question.

**School #28 – Russian school.** The answer to these questions was split half yes and no, while a few students also left it blank. Those that answered yes wrote that people in the community generally need to be involved but they did not identify any one individual. Only four said that the president or government members are important. A dozen of those who answered no said that there is nothing in the community for them.

**School #153 – Uyghur school.** Two thirds of the students felt that it was important to be ‘generally’ involved in different areas of the community, while two specified that it is important only in Almaty. No one identified a particular person as being important.

### **Question #4**

*What language(s) do you think are important to know in the world today? Why do you think this?*

**School #12 – Kazakh school.** Around 90% of the students answered that knowing one’s own native language is the most important, or that Kazakh is the most important before listing other languages. They said that English is also important, for reasons of international and intercultural communication, and Russian because students responded that it is still in wide use in Kazakhstan. Additionally important is Chinese, as two dozen students feel that it is used in trade and international relations.

**School #28 – Russian school.** Nearly 100% of the students answered that English is the most important language to know, even putting it before Russian. These same students wrote that Russian is important, but listed it at second. Around 60% of students also said that Chinese will become more important in the future, giving the reason that China will be a great power.

**School #153 – Uyghur school.** All of the students from this school also highlighted that English and Russian are important languages, especially for communicating with others. 14 of them said that their own native Uyghur was important and four added that Kazakh is important to know because of the country that they live in.

### **Question #5**

*What countries that border Kazakhstan do you*

*think are important to its future? Why do you think this? Do you think there are any countries that do not border Kazakhstan but are still important for its future? Why?*

**School #12 – Kazakh school.** Russia and China were listed as the two most important countries that share a border with Kazakhstan by around 80% of students. These students said that they are important for economic and political reasons, and general relations. The other countries that share a border, such as Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, were only listed by several students. As for non-bordering states, the United States and Turkey were said to have importance for reasons of trade and good relations.

**School #28 – Russian school.** 90% of the students answered that Russia was the most important state for Kazakhstan, followed by China. The reasons were similar to School #12, that they are important for economic and political relationships. Three students also listed Germany and Japan as important countries that do not share a border, and said so because of economic and development ties.

**School #153 – Uyghur school.** Half of the students from this school said that all five countries are important for Kazakhstan and half of them gave no response. Four answered that Russia and China are important without giving reasons why, and two said that the U.S. is important and also did not answer why they thought that.

### **Questionnaire Summary**

The survey results show that most of the students at School #12 think that Kazakhs and topics related to Kazakhstan, such as those in literature, history, language, etc., are more important than others. Few students gave broad answers to questions when they had the option, instead choosing for example that only Kazakh writers or that certain events in Kazakh history are significant. They also wrote that knowing one’s native language is the most important language to know in the world today. They gave similar answers as other schools for question five. Overall, Kazakh students responded with answers that indicate the education system has been effective in shaping their identity.

The students from the schools #28 and #153 gave answers that at times proved the education system was also shaping their identity, but they gave additional answers that presented a somewhat different view of the subjects. Many students, especially from School #28, gave answers that represented both Kazakh and Russian literature and acknowledged the importance of the Kazakh language in addition to English and Russian. One of the most noticeable groups of answers came with question #3, that half of the students from School #28 felt that community involvement is not important because they do not see anything in it for them. To summarize the effects of this on students of other ethnicities, their identity is being shaped by the education system. There are however, a few things



that act as a balance to this, most notably separate language schools. These separate schools allow other ethnicities some level of autonomy. This affects how the subjects are taught.

There are other influences on students outside of school that shape their identity such as family, peers, and community institutions. Education is just one area that influences the national identity of young generations. However, the survey results are as honest a look as possible into what these students think about the given subjects, and with open-ended questions given under the condition of anonymity, the answers can speak for themselves. The national curriculum is having an effect on the identity of the young generations, even if other influences are pushing them to think differently.

#### **Assessment**

Education can be used to shape national identity. Given the demographic changes in Kazakhstan and that Kazakhs (as opposed to an outside power) have control of their education system; this identity is being shaped by education in Kazakhstan. The national curriculum standards, observations, and student surveys indicate that Kazakhs have asserted their views in their education system, particularly through the five previously-mentioned subjects.

As this continues to be shaped, Kazakhstan is developing economically through energy exports while becoming an increasingly-important global and regional security partner. As a member in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the 2010 chair of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Kazakhstan is involved with security issues in two important spheres in the world. Kazakhstan's importance as an east-west bridge in Eurasia will continue to grow.

What this ultimately means for Kazakhstan is that citizens in the next 10-15 years will have a somewhat different national identity than those currently in government and influential positions. The same identities behind those who protested at the Zheltoksan incident are felt today in the education system and are in many ways a continuation of that. Kazakhs want to have their own state, free from outside rule. Younger generations will very likely conduct themselves along similar lines. This change should be noticed by states or organizations that want to interact effectively with Kazakhstan in the future.

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